

+ David Carson







Front and back cover (art by mezzanine) and page 1 designed by David Carson.



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EMIGRE TYPE FONTS

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A
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PUBLICATIONS

More later...

DAY

A telephone conversation between RUBY VANDERLANS and DAVID CARSON

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1.

Cover, Ray Gun 6.



Rady: I should start off this conversation by saying that I found Ray Gun 6 to be brilliant and a milestone issue design-wise. I remember being at Tower Books, picking up that issue and just browsing through it, and being really amazed. It was flipping through it from back to front, so I started with the review section... David: I've actually thought that might be a good way to do magazines, from back to front, since so many people look at them that way. R: I thought the review section was just really, really nice and it's difficult to get how it affected me into words because it was truly a gut feeling, especially...

R: I actually felt that to be our weakest review section yet. But I like the idea of the work eliciting a "gut reaction." R: Standing there at the

Tower Books surrounded, with about two thousand different magazines on the shelves, and yet you just know you are not going to find this approach in a whole lot of magazines, if in any at all. I've looked at all issues of Ray Gun and I do think there are hits and misses from page to page. D: Yeah. R: Overall, I believe Ray Gun succeeds, better than any music magazine, in visualizing "alternative" rock. And when you look at all the issues you've put out, I felt issue 6 was the best. So far, all the issues have been eye openers, but if I had to pick one, this would be it. And again, it has a lot to do with how I went quickly through it. Perhaps if I sat down and studied it, looked at all the spreads and all the issues, another issue would come forward. But that one just kicked me right in the head. R: I am never completely happy with an issue. There are always some pages I like and some I don't. R: Perhaps that's what makes you want to go on to the next one?

D: That's part of it. I think it would be a bad sign if I were completely satisfied with an issue. R: You are, of course, creating towering expectations when you design these brilliant issues; you have to constantly outdo yourself. D: Is that a pressure you feel with *Smogger*? R: Absolutely. D: With *Smogger* and a half issue, do you feel jaded at all, or are you still excited about upcoming issues? R: Yes, I am excited about upcoming issues, but there are other things that have started to interest me as much as the design, such as doing interviews. You would think at any profession, although perhaps this is more true with artists, the more you do it, the better you get at it. But with graphic design, if you have any integrity and if you constantly challenge yourself, I think it only gets more difficult. D: I agree. That's when you open yourself up to more mistakes and the extremes of creating some really good work and some really bad work. I believe if you're not making some of these mistakes, you are probably not progressing. R: Do you feel it's getting tougher and tougher? R: No, not yet. But I am only at issue 8. R: But you have *Beach Culture* behind you. D: Even with *Beach Culture*, that puts me up to 14. You've still done almost twice as many issues as I have. Since every article has its own content and angle, they all require different thought processes and solutions.

That's what keeps me interested. R: The topics somewhat shifted from *Beach Culture* to *Ray Gun*, which must have given you something of an injection of new thoughts. D: In some ways it shifted and in some ways it didn't. *Ray Gun* is a bit more focused, which can be good or bad. You can only do so many hard hits. But they're all different bands and it's a challenge to interpret the different personalities or styles of music in appropriate ways. R: About the jaded thing, from *Smogger* 18 on, we have heard opinions and received letters, saying that what we do is

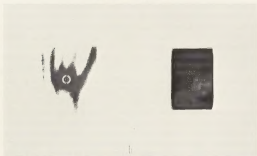


Page 18 and 19, Ray Gun 8

old hat. (There's a letter in the back of this issue making such a statement.) Q: That was a big difference for me in doing *Key-Gee* versus *Beach Culture*. With *Key-Gee*, people were actually able to find copies from the start. We got letters from all over the country from people who had never seen *Beach Culture*. They'd express amazement at this type of work, which they'd never seen before. And I'll be thinking "What do you mean? The stuff's been around for a while." R: And that's nice. We've been around for ten years and... Q: Is that a plus or a minus? R: We're still alive and we're still doing what we've set out to do. Q: What did you set out to do? R: Among other things, work for ourselves and be independent. Before *Enigma*, I worked for other people. I worked at the *San Francisco Chronicle* for three years and in Holland I worked for three years for different studios. When we realized that we could run our own business, that became very important. That's in a sense what we set out to do. And we were able to do it, not by publishing a magazine, because that, by no means, pays the bills, but by milking typifaces. Q: There is a type designer in Canada who told me you had expressed to him how glad you were that you would never have to do any more housework, because the type business was so good. Is that true? R: I was happy not having to deal with clients' whims and compromises anymore, because I felt I wasn't able to do what I wanted. Zuzana Licko and I just simply started to focus our energy and poured it into our type foundry and magazine. I had worked as a designer for clients for quite some time. I've talked to many designers who would love to do their own thing as opposed to working for other people. But I still do occasional commercial design jobs. I am doing an illustration for you for *Key-Gee* right now. Q: For free, I might add. Do you ever feel that resentment from other designers and their criticism is somehow tied to the fact that they wish they had the freedom that you've got? R: Our criticism we often get is that the work can look "good" because we don't work for a client. I can understand why they think that. You must get that type of criticism also? Q: Occasionally, but I DO have a client. Thousands of them in fact, in the form of readers and subscribers. In a way, the publisher Marvin Jarett, is my client, as are the people who advertise with us. R: But you have a fair amount of freedom? Q: Yes, I do. I've always tried to work with clients and projects that allow me that freedom. R: The hidden message when people criticize our work is that there are no parameters; it can be

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Opening spread, P.3. Harvey Smith, *Key-Gee* 4.



anything we want it to be. They don't understand that there are many restrictions, not just because we have to pay the bill. And that's a huge restriction, because we don't have very large budgets for *Emigre*. D: I think you have more freedom even than I do because you are basically a trade magazine. *Search Culture* and *Ray Gun* are consumer magazines. R: Sometimes it is intimidating to have so much freedom. D: If you did a consumer magazine, do you think you would do it in the same style as you do *Emigre*? R: It depends on the magazine. I've worked on consumer magazines. I also worked at a daily newspaper, where generally nothing was possible because there were one hundred editors and they looked at you as a facilitator, a glorified paste-up person. The paper was put together by the editors and they had very particular ideas about how it should look. We just followed their instructions.

D: Were you continually frustrated in that position or was it satisfying for a while? R: It had its good points, certainly. The Sunday review allowed for some creative work. I worked on other magazines, too. I designed *Shift*, an art magazine,

and I did the base layout for *MacWeek*, a weekly computer magazine, and neither looked anything like *Emigre*. But with *MacWeek*, I felt out of place and that I really failed, mostly because I wasn't in line with the publisher. They had very specific ideas. They wanted it to look like *AdWeek*; they had such a great notion about how their magazine should look and it was so different from what I wanted it to be. And I'm not a very good salesman. It just never quite worked out. D: That must be a major plus when doing your own magazine—you don't have to sell it to anybody. R: Exactly. Except on the end, I do have to sell my 7,000 copies. It sounds so easy, "You can do what you want." But ultimately, I can only do it if I am able to sell the magazine so that at least it pays for itself. We can not run it with a loss. D: In that respect, I'm in much the same position with *Ray Gun*. Do your sales of *Emigre* fluctuate much from issue to issue? R: No, it's pretty steady. *Emigre* #15, which was devoted to and created by a group of young designers in Holland, sold pretty well because there were a few Dutch distributors that aggressively sold it in Holland. But other than that, they all do the same. We have 2,000 subscribers and 3,000 copies pre-sold to news and foreign distributors and the remaining 2,000 we sell over time.

D: When you first called me to do an interview in early spring '82, I agreed immediately and we set it up for the next day. I arrived at the right time and all there was was a message from you saying that it was "getting too much publicity" and the interview had been canceled. I was always curious why that made you want to cancel the interview? R: Shortly after we had made the arrangement for that telephone interview (for *Emigre* #2), the Nick Bell issue somebody had found out a copy of the article in *Prior* magazine about you that had just been published, and, as you've done on a number of occasions, you mentioned our feet in a not so kind way, and it simply rubbed me the wrong way. D: You have brought that up a couple of times and I think you are referring to the reference I made that some of the facts seem to get dated real quickly, and almost completely disappear from use. Would you disagree with that? R: No I fully agree with that. D: Then I guess I am confused about your feelings. R: The fact that they are dated doesn't make them bad,

Photo showing a detail by David Carson



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does it? When selling typefaces is your livelihood, and certain designers, like you, who have gained some status within the design world, designers whom other people listen to, who get a platform like *Print* or *ADW* magazines that go on to 50,000 graphic designers, who repeatedly say what I consider to be rather negative things about the typefaces, that hurts. I guess I was surprised to see you make these statements, thinking you were on our side. Q: I hear negative things said about Ray Gun Fonts at the time, but we don't blacklist the people who say them. I'd be more upset if everyone liked them. Also, you're looking at an eight or ten page article, or an hour and a half lecture, and one semi-critical sentence. R: I didn't cancel that first interview simply because you dislike our fonts. Like I said, I also felt you were getting your share of exposure. Looking back at it, yes, it all seems rather petty. But there was a time when we would supply you with our fonts even before we had officially released them, because you wanted to be the first designer to use them. I guess we had expected a little bit more respect and perhaps a few kind words in effort the criticism. Q: As you know, that happened once, with one typeface. Your wife had agreed to send me a copy of *Seaside* before it was "officially" released. After seeing it, I decided it was appropriate for *Beach Culture*, and a distorted version of it became the logo. Using that typeface, as the logo, designates a certain amount of respect for the typeface. R: Again, the typefaces are very close to us, we spend a lot of time working on them, and we were surprised to see you put a negative swing on them, after you had just used them quite a bit. Q: Do you think you ever put a negative swing on someone else's work or design? R: I have criticized other people's work, sure. But I've always done that in interviews, so people can respond and defend themselves. When you make these statements in a national magazine or lecture, which you supposedly do, I can't do anything about it. Q: I think you've been critical of people's work in ways other than just the interviews. And you do respond to "these statements" in a variety of ways. You mentioned in a letter to me that you printed these questions ("11 Questions I've always wanted to ask David Carson") in *Emigre* 24 because you were "pissed" at me. Can you explain why? R: Like I said in that letter, I was pissed because we had made an arrangement to do the interview for *Emigre* 24. After canceling that first interview, I came back with the idea to devote an issue to Ray Gun, because I was intrigued by the people who were going to put it out. I had sent you the interview with the publisher Marvin Javett and you knew I was doing an interview with the editor Neil Fenselman. You initially agreed to doing the interview, then you kept changing your mind and at the very last moment you decided not to do it and I felt left out in the cold. Q: That's why those questions were printed? Even though you knew two weeks before you even started designing that issue that I wasn't going to be involved? R: As you know, we had already printed the announcements listing your name. At that point I thought, "If David can do a 'No Emigre Fonts Issue' (see cover *Beach Culture* 4), perhaps I can do a 'No David Carson Issue.'" Q: It would have had to have been billed like that for that concept to work. Then it would have been funny, not just mean-spirited. I've often wondered if that "No Emigre Fonts Issue" was really behind a lot of this. As you've heard me express in my lectures, that cover blurb was not pointed against you. It was a personal change of direction for myself. I felt I had relied too much on the *Emigre* Fonts in the first issue of *Beach Culture*, and it was time to get back to more basic typefaces. I wanted to concentrate more on the total design, rather than the font choice. After the "No Emigre Fonts Issue" I only used traditional typefaces in *Beach Culture*.

Getting back to *Emigre* 24, you mentioned that *Beach Culture* won countless design awards and you say "I believe it was largely indicative of the stagnation in publication design in America and the alienation with surface style that these competitions seem to emphasize." Obviously some design shows are better than others. It has a lot to do with the selection of judges. Increasingly, we're seeing design shows emphasize

[illegible]

elseas and in you? R: The work of Rick Valenzuela, Barry Deck, DeVito, Jeffrey Kandy, John Weber, Edward Fella, Scott Makela, Tibor Kalman, Fabian Berger, David Caruso... I think some of the most exciting design work around today is done in America. If you, or that comment, read that I am driving the entire thing, distasteful and photography community then... Q: Without that explanation, I think that is the implication. That's why I wanted to clear that up. I also believe many people wouldn't be familiar with the work of the designers you mention had they not seen it in some of the design competitions. So perhaps that is an advantage to some of these events. R: Again, that remark was meant to bring into question the design competitions more than the work submitted. D: In the same issue [Eagle 24], in your introduction, you show the cover of *Beach Culture 6* and the first issue of *Ray Gun* and the caption reads "Ray Gun 1 or *Beach Culture*?" What did you mean by that? R: Well, it was a question. Since it was the same art director and same editor moving on to another magazine, I figured it was a fair question, to wonder whether *Ray Gun* was a continuation of *Beach Culture*. D: *Beach Culture 7* was the result of two years and five issues that went before it. It had a history. *Beach Culture 7*, had there been one, would have been completely different.

from Ray Gun 3, which was published over a year later and was the first issue of a new magazine with a new subject matter, new staff, and new audience. Publication design is a process. You have to go through one issue to get to the next. It's a continual growth process and the magazine evolves. E: That's a good explanation.

D: I was always curious what the trash can (cover *Emigre* #24) was about? E: People are simply obsessed with anything new. Look at the music business. The bands that are doing the best are the new bands. D: Actually, many of the bands that seem to have been around forever are doing quite well. U2, REM, and Aerosmith come to mind. E: After talking to Marvin Jurek (former publisher of *Crescent* magazine), he too said he had grown bored with *Crescent* and couldn't do certain things that he wanted to do, and he had a need to start a new magazine, namely *Ray Gun*. Anne Burdick also wrote about this phenomenon of designers being gobbled up and spit out and everybody.

D: Who do you feel are some of the designers that have been "gobbled up and spit out"? E: I think Neville Brody is a good example. The work that he has done, for which I have great respect, has been copied and eaten up and spit out. It happened to him twice. First, his work for *The Face* was copied very fast. Then, after he started doing *Arcade*, the type of work he did there, the far references, going back to a more rational approach, was taken over by advertising so fast it was unbelievable. And then it was forgotten and people started searching for the next best thing to copy. D: Any other people besides Neville? E: I think Ed Fella's work has been fairly closely copied or appropriated by many of his students and other designers. But this doesn't say anything about Neville Brody or Ed Fella. It says something about the people doing the gobbling up and spitting out. Neville Brody and Ed Fella are still doing incredible work. It is the outside world that comes in when it sees that something is successful in a certain area and lifts, appropriates, uses, misuses, and then forgets the work. You don't agree with me on that? D: I don't agree that people like Ed Fella have been gobbled up and spit out. E: Perhaps he is at the stage of being gobbled up. The spring comes later. But again, it has nothing to do with Ed or Neville. Their work is still very good. I wish I could be half as pretentious as Neville Brody. I am talking about the outside world, other designers copying and lifting ideas. D: I think copying and lifting is different from gobbling up and spitting out. E: It's a choice of words. D: Any others you can think of? E: Perhaps your own work. I have seen the work that we have seen in *Ray Gun* applied in other places.

Anyway, to continue my answer to your question about the garbage can, when I was trying to come up with an idea for that cover, I thought that one effect of this "Neomasters" was that you'll end up with a lot of obsolete stuff, garbage, and that's why I choose that picture of the garbage can. D: I don't feel that because something has become obsolete it means it was "garbage" when it was produced. It may have been speaking to a particular audience at a particular point in time. Originally, you told me the trash can had something to do with the press you were getting at the time, and Massimo Vignelli's comments in the *Print* magazine interview. Is that out the door? E: Yes, that's still the case, because that was happening at the same time. I thought it would be really funny, after *Emigre* had just been called a "typographic garbage factory" by Massimo Vignelli, to have a garbage can on the cover. I wondered what Massimo would think when we made it look like we pointed the finger at other people making trash. It's all a lot longer on checks. D: You've mentioned to me that *Emigre* magazine will be around long after we are all dead and gone—that all the issues have become collector's items. So perhaps you've escaped the garbage can. E: There's at least one garbage can we haven't escaped. D: Have you ever talked to Mr. Vignelli about the interview in *Print*? E: No, I never did. D: I guess they tried to get you and him together at the MIGA conference. E: Yes, I've had more than one invitation to do that. D: They told me you didn't want anything to do with it. Why is that? E:

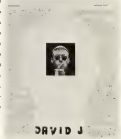
First of all, I don't think I am a very good public apologist. I also felt that Massimo was very unimpressed about our work. I don't think he knew our work at all. His critique seemed a bit unfair. I think he had heard of us and perhaps seen a few issues of *Esquire* in which he inevitably must have seen the work done by other designers. We just became a punching bag for a type of work that he really despises. And I didn't feel like being the guy who would go up there on stage to duke it out with Massimo Vigorelli. Earlier in this interview, I talked about the problem that I'm in of owning my own magazine and how everything that can be. How close are you to having your own magazine with *Search Culture* and *Ray Gun*? In the terms of ownership, I don't own any of it. So I am really not very close. But I have a lot of artistic freedom



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Opening spread: *The Slaves* spreads, *Ray Gun* 5

and that's always been more important to me than financial rewards. R. Is Marvin Jurens, the publisher, the only other person that you have to deal with at *Ray Gun* in terms of passing the design? D. *Ray Gun* was started in three different offices and with three different computers and is now in two different offices with two different computers. There's never been, until recently, a central office. But the design and editorial departments are still hours away from each other, and there is not a lot of day-to-day interaction. Marvin basically trusts my judgment. A publisher or an editor has a tremendous effect on the look of a magazine. I've been fortunate to work with people like Marvin Jarrell and Randy Bookstein, who allow me to do the work they hire me to do. R. How do you submit the designs for *Ray Gun*? D. I submit them to the operator. When I am happy with them, they are forced to be made into them. E. Marvin doesn't see them until there is a blue card? D. A large part of the magazine, no. The more important parts to him, such as the cover, the cover story, and some of the features he's been involved in, I'll fax or Fed Ex him and he'll give me his input. But for the rest of the magazine he basically trusts me. I've never seen a situation with *Ray Gun*. Is that, at least half the magazine is sent to be printed without me seeing any proofs. E. That's amazing! D. It's a little scary. And it causes problems. In the seventh issue, the title of the Matthew Sweet article got left off by the operator. So the opening spread in the article makes no sense whatsoever. In the first issue, they



Page David J. article, *Ray Gun* 1

FURY

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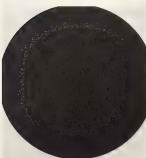




south of San Diego. There are many graphic designers who believe they have to live in a major city in order to find clients, etc. You are obviously disproving this theory. How do you account for being this successful without living in N.Y. or L.A. or San Francisco? B: My clients tend to find me, often as a result of seeing my work in various design annuals or publications, and now I'm getting a fair amount of calls from people who have seen Ray Gun. Because of this visibility, I think I have more freedom about where I live. Sometimes I think I should be in L.A. or New York, and be closer to other potential clients. But I enjoy where I'm living. I'm able to walk to my studio and I'm two houses back from the ocean. R: Do you think it could benefit you in terms of the work load if you moved to New York? B: I wonder about that. I think it would. Then again, I don't really need a lot of

extra work right now. But I also wouldn't rule out a change of location. I am a little isolated down here, which, sometimes, can be a disadvantage. Whereas if you are in New York or other big cities, there are always lectures or exhibitions that you can attend. But the isolation also gives me some freedom and hopefulness it allows the work to stand on its own and not have the look of a certain geographic location. R: How do you approach this variety of jobs? Do your clients come to you for your particular approach and do you simply apply this approach to all jobs? If so, is that at all stifling in terms of your own development? B: There's no formula. Every assignment or project has to be evaluated on its own terms and its own needs, taking into consideration the client and the audience. So there is no formula. It would certainly be quicker or easier if there was. R: But, as you said earlier, some of the clients do come to you for your particular approach? B: They come to me because they have seen the work and are attracted to it. They usually are not aware of what's involved in the approach. I don't do any self-promotion. I've sent out one postcard in ten years. People get a hold of me usually because they like a certain sensibility in my work. R: What do you

think they see? B: They're seeing an approach to design that they feel will speak to their audience. It's as simple as that. I don't get calls from *Modern Maturity* or *Go! Digest*. R: You've actually had very little formal training in design. But you spent time in Switzerland with Hans Rudi Lutz. How did you end up there? B: I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology. I saw an announcement for a Swiss program, read the description and it sounded interesting, so I applied. I sent some samples of the work and... R: Those programs don't require a BA in design? B: No, they just required samples of your work. When I look at people's work I don't care what grades they got. I just want to see the work and hear their explanations. R: You've mentioned this workshop a few times in your interviews. It must have made quite an impression. B: It did. It was really early in my whole exposure to



Page: 100/100 AD 100/1

graphic design. They had main speakers and then some designers who were considered as fringe, who did presentations at night. These people attracted me the most. They were people doing what they loved and making a living out of it, and that was real appealing to me. R: Is there anything visible in your work now that you say would be a direct result of that particular workshop? S: Probably some of the experimenting with letter spacing and word breaks. But overall, I don't feel it was that specific. It's more an attitude—an attitude of why not try that? Why not experiment? I was always impressed by these typographic experiments that at first glance appeared whimsical, but always had an in-depth explanation for why they were done. I remember the critiques. The first question would always be, "Why is that there?" and as long as you had an answer, it was fine. If you said that you simply liked it there, your piece was discarded immediately. This early exposure to a conceptually oriented, experimental approach to design, combined with having never learned all the things you're not supposed to do, no doubt, has had its effect on my work. The person responsible for getting me started down this path was Jackson Bawls, a very talented instructor, designer, and artist from Tucson, who taught a two week summer workshop at the University of Arizona that was my first exposure to "graphic design." R: If an undergraduate design student would ask you for ad-



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vice on which grid school is going to, what would you suggest? D: I get asked that frequently. The first full time assistant I had on Ray Gun, Amy Lam, had just graduated from the grid program at Yale University when I hired her. Based on the strength of her portfolio and the work she did for me, I would say they should definitely look into that program. Overall, the most interesting work, writing, and attitude I've seen from a grid school in the past year has come from Greenbrook. So I would also recommend looking into their program. And Cal Arts has such an amazing pool of talent in their faculty that their program should be seriously considered, as well. I'd say look at those primarily, and go with one that feels right to you. R: Have you ever considered going back to grid school? D: I spent three days at Greenbrook where I gave a lecture, hung out with the students and their projects and sat in on the critiques, and it really made me think. Could I do this? I liked the intensity, the around-the-clock obsession with design. You seem to find more passion for design at a good grid program than you do in most workplaces or studios. And I like that I seriously considered doing it, and if somebody in my position asked me the same question I'd probably encourage them to do it. But I've got projects I am really involved in and enjoy right now, and it's hard to break away. Yet I don't rule it out, either.

R: This is a curious question perhaps, but I've noticed that although you've always had full color at your disposal, your use of type, throughout *Book Culture* and *Ray Gun*, has always been primarily black. Why is that? D: I am drawn to the letter forms and the interaction. Sometimes I use type almost as abstract art, to help create a mood. Color is always a secondary concern to me. When I reconsider whether I should have used color, I usually don't change anything. It's much more concerned with what the type is doing, whether it is interpreting a story, what feel it is generating. I don't feel color is a particular strength of mine. R: Could I have anything to do with the fact that you do all your printing on the Letter printer? Or do you have a color printer? D: No, I don't own a color printer, although I have access to them. I have a color

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Book Culture

screen, though, so I could put color on type. But I don't do it there, either. To me, it seems a surface thing, a style thing, and it doesn't interest me as much. There are places where I have used color to interpret something or to set a certain mood or meaning, but for the most part, type should be able to do that on black. R: Correct me if I am wrong, but you mention to be using Letter printer type in your layouts. Is

that a hodgepodge result or done on purpose? D: Often it's a time result, a three-in-the-morning result, when the boards are late and they absolutely have to go out in a couple of hours. The first few issues of *Ray Gun* had some body copy that was done that way. There certainly have been places in headlines where the quality of a laser printout was more fitting for the tone of the article. I also think that *Ray Gun* is a magazine where you can get away with Letter printouts from time to time. It's rock and roll. I don't think there's a lot of places where it would be appropriate. R: I've always wondered why you chose to sit so many at

Cover: *Beach Culture* 4 (The "No En-gre Fonts Issue")
Photography by Anton Corbijn, p. 1

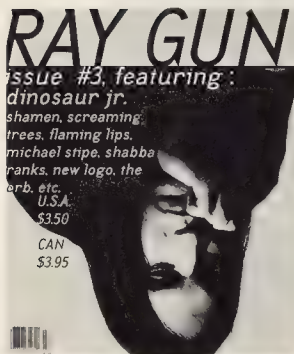
established artists in *Beach Culture*, people such as Mahurin, Arisman, Henrik Drescher and Anton Corbijn. Why didn't you try to introduce some younger, less polished talent, which is what you are doing now with *Ray Gun*? D: *Beach Culture* was the first opportunity I had to use illustrators and photographers whose work I had admired for a long time. But there were other considerations as well. The quality of the work was the first criterion. Then, when you are starting a magazine calling itself "*Beach Culture*" you are at a disadvantage just by the name alone. I would call people and say "I am working for this new magazine called *Beach Culture*..." and there'd be laughter, or there'd be silence, or somebody would say, "Jeez, *Beach Culture*, isn't that an oxymoron?" So I figured to help the magazine gain some credibility, I should get some established names in there. They weren't all "big names" but a high percentage of them were. And after that happened, people would say, "*Beach Culture*, what kind of magazine is that?" and then when they'd find out they'd say, "Oh, Henrik Drescher, Matt Mahurin, well let me check this out," and they would tend to be less likely to dismiss it on the basis of the name. With *Ray Gun* it's been a very conscious effort to use younger, less well known people. Many of the people I use are still in school. A lot of them have never been published. Partly because of the success of *Beach Culture*, *Ray Gun* was not as suspect, and I didn't feel I had to use artists whose names people recognized. I see the magazine as a kind of forum where I can expose new people, whether they are type designers, illustrators, photographers, writers or artists. R: How were you able to afford the contributors in *Beach Culture*? D: We did have a parent company, so there was a budget. In fact, there was more of a budget than at *Ray Gun*. There was some money, but it was embarrassingly low. But I was able to get some of the best people in the country, primarily because I offered them complete freedom to do what they do best. That seemed to work no matter how big or famous or rich they were. R: Still? D: It's starting to wear a little thin with some of the people whom I keep going back to. Some of the people I approached I figured would never have contributed to *Beach Culture*. But I can't remember anybody turning me down. R: Didn't you turn down Milton Glaser? Or was it that you didn't like one of his illustrations? D: I thought that calling Milton Glaser was such an odd call that I might get something great. Sometimes the less expected, stranger ideas get you the best results. I sent Milton a copy of *Beach Culture* and told him I needed a cover and that he could do whatever he wanted. A couple of days later, I got the artwork Fed-Ex'ed to me from Milton. I didn't feel it was the cover, so I used it inside the magazine instead. R: That's amazing though. Even Milton Glaser still does stuff for free! D: Well, there was a token fee, but it was very token, kind of an embarrassing amount. That's the kind of thing that ties a lot of us together. You do jobs for the satisfaction of getting to do what you like to do. Whenever I hire somebody to do an illustration or photography, if their first question to me is about money or payment or where to send the bill, then I always cringe and know this somehow isn't going to work out. And it rarely does. I need somebody who is obsessive about the project, and sees it as a way to push themselves, and as an added bonus, they may even get some money for it. I need that same attitude with interns or anybody that may help on the magazine. R: Do you do much work for free? You must get a lot of invitations for submissions? D: A fair amount. I'm doing a couple of free covers for you right now. It seems like more of them now are paying than they used to. But I'll probably always do some work for free, if the project is one that interests me. Right now, I'm working on a TV commercial with Matt Mahurin and Gorilla Heads (an Atlanta, Georgia design firm) that will be a public service announcement, trying to dispel some of the stereotypes about mentally disabled people in our society. There's no fee involved. R: Rick Poyser, in the book "Typography Now" talks about the work of the London-based Why Not? and your work and says that the work

is "formally stunning, but its relevance to the content is not always clear. The designs function decoratively as a means of engaging, amusing, persuading and no doubt sometimes infuriating the reader, rather than as vehicles for extending meaning or exploring the text." Do you agree with this description of your work? Is your work no more than what Andy Altman of the Why Not? calls "type as entertainment"? D: I hope it is entertaining. I certainly think *Emigre* is entertaining. I admire much of the work Rick has done with *EYE* magazine. I gave a lecture with Rick in Philadelphia for the AIGA and he told me he was not a fan of *Ray Gun*. But regardless, I think Rick was uninformed about my work. The work is very much concept-driven. Without question, it is attempting to extend meaning, and certainly tries to explore the text. If the "relevance to the content" is not always clear to Rick, that doesn't bother me. R. After seeing you go through all your spreads in your lecture in San Diego I should say that the *Beach Culture* spreads did be-

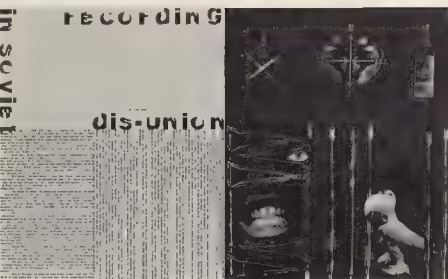
come clearer when you explained them. Perhaps some were fairly easy to read at first sight. But with *Ray Gun*, I do find it more and more difficult to find those conceptual designs and it does seem to lean more towards type as entertainment. D: The starting point is still the same, which is to interpret the artist, the music or the interview. A good example is the third issue. J. Macis from Dinosaur Jr., is upside down on the cover. We did a cover story on him and all his comments were about how he had no respect for magazines, no respect for interviewers, no respect for photographers or anything to do with magazines. This kept coming up throughout the whole interview. Running his portrait upside down was my response to the respect issue. The point is, it was not arbitrary. I didn't say, "Let's do something weird and put him upside down." I

think the reader may or may not get the point I am trying to stress in the layout, but I think it makes it more valid to at least have that starting point. There certainly have been pages in *Ray Gun* that have no deep meaning, that are simply fun. But I think rock and roll should be fun.

R. Do you feel that the acceptance of your work by the design community has ever benefited from the fact that your work, formally, resembles the experiments carried out at Cranbrook and CalArts, two schools that have been instrumental in broadening the interest and acceptance of design theory? D: I don't feel the work is that similar. Besides, I barely know how to use Photoshop. But I do think some of the most interesting work in the country is coming from these schools. Certainly the exposure of the work done at these schools helps create an environment that accepts other experimental work. I've given a number of lectures at various colleges and often see work influenced by *Beach Culture* and/or *Ray Gun*. So if there's been some "benefit" as a result of these schools, I feel it would tend to be a mutual one. There may be some negatives associated



Cover Ray Gun 3



Spread Ray Gun 6



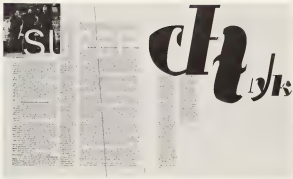
the idea of making new fonts available for a limited time and then stop selling them. Kind of like what they did with the original Swatch watches. R: It's that way you are selling them for \$100 per font, to keep them from selling on large scale here? Q: We are not interested in a K-Mart style font shop. These are custom fonts, designed by some very talented individuals and I think they're worth \$100. If someone doesn't, that's fine. They can always pick up *Omigod* for \$65. R: What did you think about that article in *Esquire* about new fonts, in which many of the Ray Gun fonts were shown? There was also quote that read "The fonts that remain truly underground are the ones that you can't read." How do you figure the writer reached this verdict? R: I am not aware of any fonts that I use that you can't read, but I think it was interesting that a magazine like *Esquire* would even do an article on fonts. You'll have to ask the writer about that quote. I don't know where that came from. You have to take it with a grain of salt. I just thought it was an interesting sign of the times that a national magazine would devote two pages to font design. R: Some designers have mentioned it made graphic design look quite silly. R: I thought the layout was odd. These were two tedious pages. Overall it is probably good to expose more people to some of these type experiments. Maybe more font designers will get work. It's two pages in a million pages they publish each year and the overall effect is probably not too big a deal. R: We always get really frustrated when people examine or discuss our work for being illegible, and hard to read, whereas you seem to bask in these criticisms. Is a recent Ray Gun review, for instance, you announced one of your lectures and you listed words from reviews describing your typography work, words such as: "visual noise, facinated, slanted, obtusated, etc." and the final line read "contributing to the decay of literacy in America." What do you hope to accomplish by this acknowledgement of the fact that your work is illegible? Q: What acknowledgement? It's not illegible. I'm just having some fun with the idea that some people think it is. You know, Rudy, the only real problem I've had with *Emigre* over the years is that you tend to take yourselves too seriously. I suspect that's where a lot of our friction comes from. You're doing some beautiful, groundbreaking new work in *Emigre* over the past decade, but sometimes I think you need to lighten up a bit and remember that we're on the same side here. Getting back to the legibility issue, I read a review of Ray Gun in USA Today that said Ray Gun may finally get young people reading again. Because Ray Gun was visually interesting, they felt young people were picking it up and getting into it, reading it, getting involved in it. I don't think that young people will read a grey page of type as readily as they might have in the past. Judging from the letters we receive, it might actually be happening— with Ray Gun we may be helping to get young people reading again. R: But then, when they buy a copy of Ray Gun, and this is my own experience from time to time, you read the articles and you can physically not read whole parts. In Ray Gun 5, the Superbank article has an entire paragraph that you can't read. Q: Yes, the article in Superbank did have chunks taken out of the copy. But only one paragraph, and you could still get the

ALL TYPES

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lot of what was being said. With Beach Culture, and to some extent Ray Gun, there was always a page or two that were difficult to read. But then people would write off the whole thing as being unreadable or hard to read. There was nothing in Beach Culture that was illegible, and very few things in Ray Gun. We have an audience, as you do, that allows us a little more freedom and seems to enjoy having to figure some things out and being involved in the magazine. For instance, we don't use page numbers. We've received hundreds of letters and only two have mentioned that fact, and they both mentioned it in a positive way. It's no big deal that we're not using page numbers, but it is interesting that no one seems to mind. People are taking in information differently these days. I don't think we've found the perfect way to present it, but we're exploring and experimenting with new ways to present information. We're acknowledging that the reader is changing. With Beach Culture, we experimented primarily with titles, and with Ray Gun it's been more the body copy. When you spoke to Marxie, before Ray Gun 1 was out, you were wondering if it was really visible, if people were going to accept this experimental approach. Well, apparently they are. Things are loosening up a bit. But to get back to your question, no, illegibility is never the goal. I don't know anybody who starts out trying to be illegible. I certainly never have. Sometimes, in solving a particular problem, a piece will become difficult to read, but then, as you've mentioned, it may be starting to say something else at that point. R. Actually, I have done one issue, Empire 8, where the goal was illegibility. It was done on purpose but you had to go through the entire issue to understand why. Even when the type became illegible it was still telling a story. When something is not done traditionally, when you use typefaces that people aren't familiar with, and it's not laid out in a familiar way, when you move away from the standard, it becomes harder to read. The funny thing is, usually it is graphic designers saying that it's hard to read.

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to work without it. Do you think that, ultimately, Ron Cook is what Neil and Marcus promised it would be? I am asking because when I read issue 6, the interviews were obligatory. The same hands and hand-kiss are featured in most other music magazines, and nothing new is reported. What happened in that original editorial angle that Neil is fixed about in the *Esquire* interview? Or, I think you have to ask them, but judging from the letters, the readers don't seem to perceive it as you do. We get letters with every issue, in which, apparently, people think that somehow the interviews are being done differently, and that they are not quite the same as other magazines. Whether it lives up to the original editorial statement, I don't know. But what do you think about the writers' bitches about the people writing letters, because there are all 27-year-old wannabes. They devour anything about their favorite bands. Neil said in *Esquire* 26 that you can't get around featuring

the same hands in the other magazines and in order to see yourself spent is by changing the angle of the stories. And in the beginning it was done. There was the Henry Rollins article that was about his books not his music. There were the articles written by musicians such as John Wesley Harding. But these kind of stories have slowly started to disappear. Or, I don't think I can forget about those people writing those letters. You may not be our audience, I may not be our audience, but the letter writers are. But I do think some of the writing could be better. Sometimes the writers either weren't up to the task, or just got lazy. The Perry Farrell/Pere for Pyres cover story was a horrible disappointment, where I felt the writer just dropped the ball. And the Henry Rollins story only happened because the editor had sent an inexperienced writer who Henry thought was not qualified to do the interview, and threatened not to do the story until he was able to choose his own interviewer. So we ended up getting a good interview by default. And yes, it's true, you won't find any more articles by John Wesley Harding, but you will find some written by Frank Black, Robyn Hitchcock, David Lowery (from Crumb), Todd Kirsch, and the members of Sonic Youth. I realize there are all major label acts. Is *Rox* just playing favorites, to bring in the 'big advertising'? Or, well, it doesn't feel like that to me. Certainly our cover choices would indicate we're not playing favorites. Is the writing at *Rox* just going to be as good as the design, you guys are going to have the most unbelievable magazine on the world, but I feel the writing doesn't quite live up to the visual presentation. Or, we're still in our first year of publication, and there's certainly room for improvement. I don't think it's a facade. It's not a completely underground site where you talk about your friend's needs. So if you're asking is this the ultimate, alternative, state-of-the-art music magazine, probably no. But I suspect it's closer to that ideal than some of the other national music magazines. Again judging from the letters, the readers seem to think so as well. Is the *Esquire* article you were quoted as saying that by the time *Temple Guide* was proclaimed the epitome of the 1990s, it was already passé? What did you mean by that? Or, I don't remember saying that, but I do think there is some truth in it. I believe it was *YVE* magazine that asked the question, "Is *Temple Guide* the epitome of the 90s?" I think at that point, my feeling was that it was seen in so many places, regardless of its availability in content, that it simply had become the latest, current, cool designer font to

Cover Art by Tim

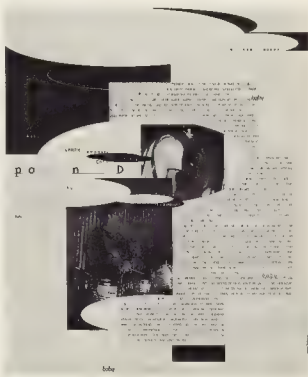


Rody: This is a bit of a philosophical question, and I wonder if you ever think about this. You mentioned that people are starting to accept this experimental approach to design and that's a good sign for designers, that things are loosening up a bit. Do you ever worry that things might loosen up too much, and that it will be more and more difficult to engage the reader, because they will simply grow accustomed to such extreme work or perhaps even become bored by it? D: If the work is just centered around stylistic or surface considerations, with no attention to concept, I think people will tire of it much quicker. But a lot of this newer work will never infiltrate the mainstream anyway. It will just be a matter of degrees of acceptability. It's not going to be a complete turnaround with graphic design in this country. There are just more avenues where it's starting to open up. And, as you've said, people are interested in what's new, and the definition of what's new will continue to change. R: But how about that particular *Ray Gun* audience?

Might they grow accustomed to your work and do you feel you have to constantly challenge them? D: They seem to appreciate an experimental attitude, and taking some chances. I think I've had that basic approach for the past ten years. The work evolves, but the framework or attitude stays fairly constant. I'm not doing work I think everyone will enjoy. I'm doing work I feel good about. I don't feel any need to challenge the reader, that's never been a goal. I do try to challenge myself, though, and keep the work evolving. R: This is an obvious question that I meant to ask you earlier. What do the writers who write for *Ray Gun* think about your interpretations of their words? D: I've been asked that before and I keep going back to the original case with *Beach Culture*. When the first and second issues had been published, some of the writers were very upset, calling us to ask what we had done to their articles. Then, towards the end of *Beach Culture*, the same writers would complain if their story didn't get some special treatment. They were concerned that a "plain" layout somehow indicated we didn't think their article was that great. And often that was the case. With *Ray Gun*, and I am not certain if it's the subject matter or what, but there was never the initial upheaval from the writers. I don't know whether times have changed enough and that they were less surprised or maybe they were aware of some of the stuff in *Beach Culture* or what. Since *Ray Gun* has gotten more attention, there has been some pretty "big name" rock and roll writers who have contacted the editorial office, mentioning they would consider writing for *Ray Gun*, but that we can't mess with their words. And, much to the publisher's and editor's credit, their position to these writers has been that maybe this is not the magazine for them. R: How about the



Page, *Great Expectations* article: *Ray Gun* 3



Page, *Pond* article: *Ray Gun* 2

fact that their writing is already an interpretation of a particular situation? D: Yes it is, but only on one level. I don't feel the interpretation needs to stop there. Maybe that's why young people are reading less—there are too many interpretations just on that one level. As I said before, it's much harder to get today's reader to read a solid page of gray type, regardless of how brilliantly it's written. Rick Poyner has suggested that the writer and designer need to work closer together in interpreting text, and that idea interests me. He tried it in the introduction to "Typography Now," but said he thought that section of the book was a failure. R: When you mentioned that *USA Today* said that "*Ray Gun* may finally get young people reading again," are you not afraid that if that type of layout gets them reading, that it will drive them away even further from reading books, which is where they are going to perhaps find a more intellectual, educational type of reading? D: Well, I don't believe books are the only place one finds an intellectual, educational type of reading. But maybe that's the challenge to book designers. I think you should be able to judge a book by its cover. Chip Kidd is doing some very expressive book design in New York. Also, I think television is

starting to better address the fact that their audiences' visual orientation is changing. R: Do you then believe, in order to get young people to read anything, it would have to be presented in an engaging and entertaining way? D: It can certainly help. It also helps tremendously if they're interested in the subject matter. Text books may not have to look like *Ray Gun*, but perhaps the gap needn't be so wide. R: Since your visual interpretation is a very personal one, do you ever feel that you take away the reader's own ability to visualize a text and create images in their mind? In other words, do you ever feel that what you are doing is manipulative? D: No, I give the reader much more credit than that. It may be manipulative in that it gets their attention and draws them into a page. As you show in *Emigre*, the choice of accenting certain words, or emphasizing pull quotes, can greatly manipulate the mood of an article. But what you said is the same criticism MTV received when it started. There was a lot of concern and debate about how we are no longer allowing people to think for themselves when they "see" these songs. And that people will no longer conjure up their own images once they hear these songs, because they are being shown what the songs should look like. Well, it doesn't

seem to have had a real negative effect. I think people are still able to think and visualize for themselves. R: The only problem that MTV created, though, was that bands who can't or won't do videos are at a significant disadvantage competing for the same audience. D: Yes, they might have to compete on the basis of their music. R: Do you think there is such a thing as a generic interpretation, or a neutral interpretation, as the Swiss designers were exploring? D: I don't think you can be neutral. You cannot not communicate. If you say nothing, that says something. If you don't respond, that's a response. If you don't have a religion, that's your religion. R: Do you actually listen to all the records and bands that are being written about in *Ray Gun*? I can imagine that you can't listen to all of it. If that's the case, do you then simply interpret a same, as with the Superchunk article? D: Sometimes that happens. I try to listen to all the music. I'm looking at hundreds of tapes as we speak and at least half of them are out of their cases and all over the desk. I try to listen to most, and ideally that would be the way to approach most music articles. But sometimes in the layout, I'm reacting more to the interview than the music. I also think I design better to music, and rare-

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Emagry: Even if, I'd like to give you guys the opportunity to hear the critics to the patch, and ask you to evaluate or evaluate your own record. But it came out as you imagined it? Rose: As far as I am concerned, it came out far better than I imagined it would. I am really happy with the result. James: I hope we can do this again. Emagry: On the new record? James: Well, we don't play music full time and the financial resources are limited. Even if I could play music, say, it means a week as opposed to working 40 hours a week, that would let us explore the music in a deeper way, right then. And when I say "40 hours a week," that's not just composing songs, that's having a main instrument or a new recording technique and then "unlearning" it. It's a time-proven practice that when you're doing something different, you have to do it over and over and over again before you start to get a sense of what you're doing. Emagry: Are you saying that some of the critics might say, for instance, that the actual playing of the instruments on the actual recording is not exactly what it could be in terms of expertise? James: I expect anything they say will be out of frustration, because they won't get a handle on our music. The problem with music, of course, is that they'll always rely on written media to try to explain it, which really is not always efficient. To me, the only way you judge it is by listening to it. Then, you either like it or you don't. My friends ask me to describe our music and that is such a loaded question, because I know their personalities, and I'll try to describe it, second guessing their taste, but ultimately I'll tell them that they need to listen to it. And even if you don't like it at first listen, maybe you'll need to listen to it again. But as far as the music industry today is concerned, that's considered to be a weakness, although I don't agree. If it doesn't have a really catchy riff, if it doesn't sound at least vaguely close to anything big right now, then they're gonna have a hard time with it. You need to become the flavor of the month and our type of music might have some problems with that. Emagry: But you are aware of that. You are not exactly new or Rose: We are both in our early 40s, in 1988. We're not naive and yet we're extremely naive. The music, to us, DOES have naivete. It's not that impulsive to grasp. Emagry: You told me that you have played together since July 4th, 1988. Why did it take this long to actually put together and send out a demo tape? Rose: We made a demo tape in 1990 and sent a few copies out. Some of the songs we had tape were the same songs that ended up on the CD. The arrangements were different, though, and they didn't have what the songs have now. Emagry: When you started in 1988, was it what the audience eventually gave a record out in the music stores, or was that really not a big concern? Rose: We always wanted to be heard by as large an audience as possible, but the main thing that got us going is that making music, to us, is like one big adventure. Everything we do is totally new to us. I feel like a kid. James: Guitar makes me feel like a kid. It's my favorite guitar player. James: We had been practicing, individually, before we met each other. Rose was writing songs and I played the guitar, but never songs. I played the guitar because I liked the sound of the guitar. My guitar playing is based more on playing with sounds than on formal song structures. When we met, and as we started developing our style, Rose would try to write songs that would have the two elements together. My guitar playing and certain aspects of my singing and the guitar playing would not always work right away. I had to change certain things or he had to change something or both of us had to compromise. That's how it still is when we're composing. We get something and we think it's good but when we listen to it, most of the time we have to go back and try to change it by picking up a different instrument or adding a different effect or by not playing anything at all. Emagry: What I find most intriguing about your music is how you are able to get together three terms of seemingly unconnected into vignettes, class, jazz looks, there's just little disembodied melodies, into one coherent song. It seems to me that what the songs together are like lyrics, the women. The music often seems to be almost like a soundtrack to the words. Is the music structured or guided by the lyrics? Rose: Pretty much. It starts with the lyrics and after that we'll enter some slow progression and all the other little odds and ends will come after that. The case of the lyrics is the structure, although the lyrics will change during the development of the songs. James: See, after a while it doesn't even matter because they just have together. And when you're finished you think it's always been there, like statues in concrete. It's like when Michelangelo said that the statue must be freed from the marble. We would have songs recorded and think we were almost there, with just a little bit of work left, and the part we needed to finish would pop up each time in a surprising way. That first bit was in there all the time but we just had to pluck it out. You wonder how we got there, but the point is that we got there and I often don't remember how. Rose: And when we're finished, when we have the songs recorded and listen to them, they break us out. Once the songs are recorded they become something spooky on their own. The point here, I feel, is that you want nobody knows. Emagry: Have either one of you ever played in other bands before? Rose: I've played with other people before but never in a real band. I was a solo and writing songs but I never found anyone to play them with. Robert: Barbara is the only band I've ever been in. Emagry: To my ears, the demo sounds very ambitious, and on many levels I think it fulfills the expectations that this ambitious comes with it. What makes me is that you are able to play such complex music, which has many styles, that you haven't played in any other bands. You do "Panic" and you sound like a weathered country band, perhaps an acid, but very uneasy new. Robert: Yeah, sure, for us this album is extremely ambitious. We're two musical idiots and we have to admit it's gonna fail at some levels because it is ambitious. That's our excuse. Emagry: How will these ambitions develop in terms of a second album? Rose: The second album will simply be part of the body of work we intend to create that'll only end when we end. The goals will be the same. Both of us get bored easily, so the next album will probably sound different. You know, new and improved sounds, but the goal will be the same - freedom. Emagry: Rose, you are actively involved in a local animal rights organization. Is that a direct result of being in Texas, the state known for beef and rodeos? Rose: The group is Value For Animals. How do I come into it? Well, I was interested, so I read about animal rights and animal abuse, and I saw it's true we humans view non-humans as a resource to feed us and to keep that machine we call "our lifestyle" running. We don't see animals as sentient beings like ourselves, or with an intrinsic value outside their possible uses for us and "our lifestyle." This is central to our music. It has to be this is slavery pure and simple. And the animal rights aspect to them as a very metaphor for the present human situation. We're born into the same bondage, blue collar or white collar, even the cattle breeds are made as just a means to feed the machine. As I'm slowly aware of the freedom I'm feeling in right now, I see us all slipping in the hole, being fed, fed up, semi-oblivious for generations in a feedlot. But I know there is a hole, a way out, and I am going through that hole. The name of the album is "freedomHOLE." I'd like to add, April 17th is the starting date to Adapt-A-McDonald's, a worldwide campaign newly asking McDonald's to put a veggieburger on their menu, like they've already done in Holland. Change the world! Okay, I'll shut up. Thanks for asking, though. Emagry: It's curious to hear you talk with such concern for animals while, simultaneously, your debut album FreedomHole features a song such as "We Don't Know" which is a bit derogatory. Although it starts quite innocently, the final line "If the day's early, we can always make her" is rather alarming, to say the least. Rose: Another name for it could be "No-Fuck Love Song." The narrator is not necessarily a sympathetic character. The narrator is a sad person unable to find his own

[illegible]

Max

Dear Emigre,

Maybe I should have wait enough alone, since you've ignored my entire missive on the subject. In every issue, you list locations that provide typesetting with Emigre fonts. One of these locations is the Type House in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In every issue, you misquilt the name of the street. I know it reads like oak tree, but it really doesn't have anything to do with trees. If you can't believe me, I refer you to the *Maple & Hammon* record.

There. I've done all I can do. If you want to go on looking ignorant, that's your business.

Kenneth S. Lawson, Wichita, Kansas

Dear Emigre,

or Michael J. Baykowski, Stefan Schuler in Emigre 26
I feel as if I have to justify (or range left) my comments about Helvetica in Emigre 24. I honestly thought the readers of Emigre would have shown a bit more insight and read between the lines. I shouldn't have to explain when my tongue is placed firmly in my cheek.

or Frank Weiss
I am glad you didn't take offense at my comment; it wasn't serious.
Like the poster:
Loser.

Colleen Marshall (somewhere in the Australian jungle)

Dear Emigre,

A short comment for Frank Weiss and some other designers. Let's get something straight — when American architect Louis Sullivan said "Form (however) follows function" in the 1890s, he said it in true understanding of "function".
Rationality, warmth, emotion, logic, force, control, culture, are no less functional than pragmatic aspects like readability. The function of typography is not reading, but reading-in-a-particular-way, which is different. So what's the difference between Remedy and Helvetica? Only attitude.
By the way, I think Emigre is getting too soft, too easy for legions of obnoxious students who can't be bothered looking further than the do-it-yourself studies philosophies of peace and love, man.

Yours sincerely,
Rene Marce, Glasgow, Scotland

Dear Emigre,

Taking up the discourse surrounding the cover of Emigre 25, I think that had the image been appropriated for me on a packet of Dutch cheese, it would have saved Mevri's customers the hassle one ask "Made in Holland?" As the cover of Emigre, it simply works as late 1980s early 90s-type magazine by using a variety of color to reaffirm the product as being a politically correct package for a market of predominantly white males whose feelings of race guilt are endemic. Wishing "Made in Holland" on the model's face only makes Mevri's own political consciousness blatant.

Ben Weiner,
Mesa Heights, London, England

Dear Emigre,

I've enjoyed using my name in print in the latest pages of Emigre, but feel a bit guilty and embarrassed about my lack of constructive comment. Well, here comes some and you'll be pleased to note that it can only be positive.

Emigre's controversial but visionary design added to the sensitive editorial content, and the resulting result at magazine, have combined to create an interactive form that has surprised even Anne Ruess and associated wonderful effort with Table. Though not the sole aim of other publications, this achievement obviously reflects successful communications. Issue 26, which I'm only beginning to digest, is living up to expectation. A particularly pertinent letter from Andres Serrano, brilliant use of vocabulary by Major Keiser, Frank Weiss justifying my belief that all serious designers are serious philosophers (a journey through the character set of Remedy shows what a beautiful draughtsman that man is) and some good fun play stuff that will, no doubt, have on all twinking a bit. Impressed by the influence of Nehru on Roger Black, I've been gobbling up their specimens whenever possible. Having saved in many about their design, I'm pleased you've chosen to run a feature on Aldo Novarese, Mevri, Polasek and Vette must be too preoccupied on the depth of their research. Anyway, I'm about to start the "On White Space" article, which I'll hopefully finish before my wife comes back with the Halpabadi. Hey, there's still so much learning on the box.

Chris,
Neil Macmillan @ Astoncliffe Typographics, Edinburgh, Scotland

Mail

Dear Emigre,

Thanks for not supporting anti-hand, anti-fast, anti-magic, anti-felt, anti-well, anti-edge, pro-rogas, pro-money, pro-rational, pro-bank, pro-corporate hands. Thanks again.

A mathematical magician pulling the strings of a London dream

Andrew Zornes, Ridgefield, Connecticut

Dear Emigre,

Here's one designer who was delighted to read that Rudy VanderLans is using version 4.5 of ReadySetGo! I've been using it, too, for the past three or four years, not because I can't afford better but because I don't need more, with system and software working as much simple harmony. All I have to worry about are my own (considerable) limitations and the demands of the job. I don't need my friends thinking me pretentious - but I must admit I wouldn't want to be classed with those so conservative they can't accept improvements. I'm not saying, either, that RSG! 4.5 is the best thing going. It's just that I have a balance here I'm unwilling (for the most part) to disturb. Of course there are times when I wonder if I'm not actively harming myself, and I do caveat quite openly the more sophisticated designs. And, yes, eventually I'll buy one (it may be a matter of survival). But I'm not sure, as my friends seem to be, that having QuarkXpress etc. will improve (any more than it will worsen) my designs. It ought to increase my accuracy and perhaps broaden the range of tasks possible. But the question of whether I've done a good or a bad job is more likely to be answered elsewhere.

I haven't been able to warm up to Quattro. This isn't surprising. It usually takes a long time. I still feel a little cool toward Excel, and for similar reasons. But Zenona Lucko's typofaces have sent me here to encourage I didn't have to look hard before I fell in love with them. Now all these beta-tester scribbles are making me pause to expect you to regard this as consumer reaction rather than serious criticism. I know you know Quattro can be used.

I liked the interview with Rick Valicenti, and particularly the difficult questions you put to him. I did not like the article on Novarese, it was too raw, too candid. I found myself wondering why the article and the business hadn't been covered - the latter made more sense.

Yours truly,

George Kelly (Apogee, a magazine for ill [or not] readers), Toronto, Canada

Dear Emigre,

This is something of a love letter. I think your magazine is wonderful.

I live in Wales and the only place I can get you is at Virgin Magazines in London - not a top I like to take regularly. Recently, also, you have been absent from their shelves. Are you okay? Are you ill? I hope not. Very good wishes and congratulations on the magazine.

Clifford McLane, Alcester, B. Wales

Dear Clifford,

We see first, thank you for your concern. The fact of the matter is that with each issue, we ship more copies to the Virgin Magazines and each time they manage to off set within a matter of weeks. You'll have to start planning your trips to London around our publishing dates, or, better yet, subscribe, and your issues of Emigre will be delivered to your doorstep first time a year.

Emigre

The following letters were posted on America Online

Dear Emigre,

This is a request for a possible theme for a future issue: A review of the work of Los Angeles's Dance Club Flyers and clothing. Some of the designers and labels to be considered are Rick Klotz (the first, the best, and a graduate of CalArts) of Jive Graphics, Raymond Less Roker of Re-Design & Ink Magazine, CO-NART, FUCT Graphics, CLOBBEN, SPETT, A.A. Graphics and Printing (the Grunge Country poster that prints most of the best club flyers), Rave Green, DVA Clothing, Riva Grifa, Stalbeck, and many many others. Their designs are retro and futuristic, denervated and sensual, real slick and also street raw, and most of all, deserving of the type of international attention and credibility that an article in an issue of Emigre can give.

Ben Reinbach-Klotz

Dear Mark,

More than one person has asked us why we haven't yet covered the rave graphics phenomenon.

First of all, most magazines beat us to the punch. Their current issue features an in-depth article superbly researched and written by Michael Dosley covering most of the people you mentioned. Secondly, we're hesitant because 99% of the rave graphics are full color. Emigre has a limited budget and therefore we are not

35

Here

able to print full color reproductions. That's why we feature so many type designers and typographers. Their work usually does not rely so much on full color. Even if we do feature designers whose work is very colorful, we usually write about their work more than show it. Writing about color graphics without the full color pictures wouldn't make sense.

Another unwritten rule we seem to follow is that the work we publish is usually from people who get in touch with us first. It makes doing interviews all the more pleasant when there is a mutual respect and interest. We have never been approached by any of the designers mentioned above, and I suspect they have little interest in *Emigre*. Although I have noticed they do use our focus quite often. Perhaps they recognize the

your color handicap we have. I had actually started calisthenic S.F. save flyers, but sent them to Michael Douglas after he told me he was doing research for the *Prince* movie. Having said all this, I am very interested in the commercial aspects of some of the new graphics and clothing company spinoffs, such as *Five Graphics*.

Only a few days after we

just sent out our

indiscriminate e-mail, we

received a e-mail from Tom

Stylianides at *Stylianides*, who runs a design

studio based in

Columbus, Ohio, who

genuinely offered to

pick up the tab. Thank

you, Tom!

Body Verdeliers

Dear Emigre,

Why not offset the production costs (of *Emigre*) with advertising sales? The magazine might not even have

to be actually in color, maybe a color supplement or section that is inserted into the rest of the magazine.

Are there not enough politically/theoretically correct advertisers out there? In the latest issue (36), there

was a full page ad for an ownership, which I guess was used to offset the color cover. If editorial integrity

is the issue, that can be set down and explained to any potential advertiser. If they do not agree with it,

they don't have to pay the space.

Hoping this gets a non-response going.

Mark Heimbach-Holmes

Dear Mark,

The full page ad in #36 that you referred to was for the Walker Art Center internship. We charge a nominal

fee for such ads simply because we like to support those institutions. The fee barely covers the cost of strip

proof and getting the ad in our color. Also, the cover of #36 was really a three-color job. It was a "work

and core" using three colors on the outside (yellow, cyan and magenta) and two colors on the inside (yellow

and black). We picked up the black from the inside and printed it on the outside in the "work and core" process.

Due to our small press run of seven thousand copies, *Emigre* is printed on a short full offset press.

Printing *Emigre* in full-color would require going to a web press and printing at least 20,000 copies. At

the risk of sounding overly modest, I doubt that there is an advertiser of this magnitude for an artistic mag

azine such as *Emigre*.

Selling ads is a work-ethic, often frustrating, organizationally nightmarish process. It can all pay off, but

only when you can offer your advertisers significant exposure.

Body Verdeliers

Dear Emigre,

Emigre is a very good magazine. The editorial content is always thought-provoking and the design is like

nothing else out there. No matter what the issue is about, or what controversial articles are printed, I'd still

like to buy a small ad for my fonts in *Emigre*. If this would let *Emigre* go to four-color, I say it would be

the best thing that's happened to *Emigre* in a long time! I know that many people at *Emigre* feel that this

would force them to dilute their magazine's content, and write things just to please the advertisers, but I

think they're wrong. I'd be willing to buy an ad no matter what they print.

Dirk Heide-Schwartz

Dear Emigre,

Hi. *Emigre* is an ad for *Emigre Graphics* and *Emigre Music*, just as *Uddle* is an ad for ITC (of course, *Em*

igre is a well designed ad, and *Uddle* is, as) But it has run ads in the past, even though they were just for

Body's pals. If it takes 4 c ads, I would hope the sub-price would drop a little. The cover of #36 is 4-c any

way, so this is all moot. It's late, I'm going to bed.

KLWinn

Dear Emigre,

I just received for two years. Was it worth it or is Keady Sam going to look as lame as Babybreath in six

months?

Amos

Dear Emigre,

Yes, my friend, Keady Sam will look dated eventually, but not nearly as quickly as the 2 billion extra con

stant faces that Post Man is all are pumping out. As for *Emigre's* demise, I look forward to a long, lo

gous dream, realized by R's purchase by Credit Nat.

Wardle

Dear Eugene,

I am writing in reply to the direct response by Elizabeth Charnas to my article "On White Space" in *Enlure* 26. In the response, she gives the example of generic food packaging as an exception to my generally stated rule that white space = quality and that white space might in fact represent two "polar economic stanzas." I acknowledge both of these exceptions, but I don't think that the exceptions prove my major argument invalid.

While I do claim that white space is the ultimate symbol of value in graphic design I also claim that white space gives meaning through context. The idea of context is fundamental to the semantic analysis of graphic design (to which I also refer) and clearly the generic package has contextual elements that would be those white space the meaning of cheap. In Australia, we also have basic white generic brands (think one as two rebar), but we also have black and gold with a corresponding color scheme that manages to look just as cheap and nasty. Clearly the white space in isolation is not the key to an understanding of the generic design, but as with all designed products, the unique combination of elements that give meaning to each other - is the generic mix, simple, bold, usually standardized typefaces, in straightforward, no-nonsense centered layout that the shopper quickly learns stands for cheap with no value added branding or design. So it is NOT the white space on its own that identifies the product, but the combination of design elements PLUS the shoppers' learned response to them. It might be that the shopper notices the basic white generic brand because of its white space, but the white space is always combined with a particular type style, which along with white space is also one of the necessary signifiers for this kind of product. So generic brands use white space, but in a particularly simple formative and organizational, which is the dominant signifier of this kind of product. I would argue that where color is of secondary importance. In defense of this, I would also note the rise of the flaked, unlabeled and obviously recycled paper packaging that is also often pretreated with simple, no-nonsense signage and signifiers not cheap, but green, non-toxic, etc.

By illustrating "On White Space" only in the response (which is of course an addendum), the illustration need to reinforce the critique and make the argument of the main article seem less forceful. If the editor had chosen to illustrate "On White Space" with generic examples, e.g., the Chanel No. 5 perfume box or particular fashion spreads, then the CONTEXTUAL signs would have demonstrated the referenced white space as fundamentally different from the generic examples.

As for the claim that the "appropriated formula of white space as a code of acknowledged good taste" is only understood by designers and design critics, I strongly disagree. I will quote two examples. 1. The shopper who buys generic products differentiates not just the white packaging, but the standardized elements that make it up, and 2. The same person will just as easily recognize any of those combinations of elements I described in the article as signifying quality, not just because of the white space, but because of their particular contextual presentation of elements.

In the interest of further debate

Edith Robertson



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